



Hal Bunderson  
Senator, District 14  
Northwestern Ada County

## IDAHO STATE SENATE

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January 31, 2005

Gary W. Stivers  
Executive Director  
Idaho State Board of Education (SBOE)  
PO Box 83720  
Boise, Idaho 83720-0037

Re: Meeting basic oral education needs for deaf children with cochlear implants and digital hearing aids

Dear Gary and members of the Board:

Attached is a letter from concerned parents of deaf and hard of hearing children with cochlear implants and digital hearing aids. Many of their concerns are similar to those I discussed with you and Harv Lyter in your office last fall.

Below are questions for which I am requesting a response. If I have failed to frame the problems or questions adequately please clarify or call me.

### Problems

Parents are deeply worried about the educational future of their deaf and hard of hearing children. Studies show that the average deaf child can only read at 4<sup>th</sup> grade level when they become adults. These parents want better and indeed, existing technology gives them a powerful option if supported by proper educational systems.

Cochlear Implants and digital hearing aids allow children to mainstream in society within several years if they are properly taught. Whereas, deaf children in Idaho's signing education program are in the program until they are 21. They believe oral education costs a fraction of the cost of signing and produces students who can function at a level comparable to those who hear without assistance.

I believe Idaho lags behind most states in its oral education programs. For example, in Utah, I understand a decided majority of their deaf preschool and school students are in oral education programs; up to 80% in some preschool ages. The majority have cochlear implants.

On the other hand, some believe it's a birthright for children born deaf to not ever hear. In fact, some have written books supporting their "deaf culture" thesis.

While we must be respectful, we should not be biased. Unfortunately in the past, it appears "deaf culture" philosophies have controlled state policy and budget decisions. Although improvements have been made, this biased support appears to continue. If signing programs get the funding, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy that there are more signing students in Idaho than oral.

### Questions

1. What are the facts about the ability of the deaf with cochlear implants to hear and function in

society? Are the Utah stats accurate? Where does Idaho stand in comparison to other states (see 7.)?

2. What are the SBOE and ISDB vision, plan and budget for oral teaching of the deaf and hard of hearing with cochlear implants and digital hearing aids?

3. A study by your office stated that the average cost of a resident student at Gooding is \$72,500 per year vs. \$2,200 for an outreach student. You indicated many resident students have multiple disabilities including deafness.

- To the extent this is the case, why isn't the school an ICFMR facility with 70% of costs paid under the federal Medicaid program? It would save the state \$50,000 per student less any additional cost of meeting Medicaid standards.
- Alternatively, why aren't those students/clients in an ICFMR facility with ISDB working with them in an outreach capacity? That could also free-up money for other student education needs.

4. Will you perform a pro forma cost benefit analysis between educating a child using signing (21 years) and a child with implant technology in oral education (6-8 years?)-each taught with appropriate specialized teachers in a similar class size?

5. Meridian School District has a specialized teacher working with Cochlear Implant children. Her salary is paid by ISDB and is just above the minimum specified in law. The parents say she is excellent but plans to leave due to low pay. Can you intercede and pay her a salary commensurate with her skill? Her three cochlear implant students will grow to nine next year. Are oral programs between districts combined to the extent practicable? Is there a competitive salary schedule for these teachers?

6. What is the SBOE plan to get the critical mass of students necessary to have an effective program in each part of the state? A plan that allows families to be together rather than the more costly and family disruptive residency program.

7. In your deliberations will you consider the impact on economic development? The jobs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will come from business that produce or effectively use science and technology. To be competitive, Idaho needs programs that effectively use and teach technology to our deaf youth.

The parents have recommended a steering committee of doctors, educators, speech therapists, parents and others specialized/interested in working with the deaf. I believe forming such a committee would be helpful to the SBOE.

Gary, I support the SBOE efforts to overhaul the ISDB strategic plan to include consideration of the matters referenced above. If you have questions, please call.

With kindest regards.

Sincerely,

Hal Bunderson

Cc: Dr. Linda Clark, Meridian School District  
Senators Geode, Cameron and Geddes  
Representatives Barraclough, Bell and Newcomb  
✓ Dr. Mark and Elizabeth Miller (Representatives of parents)